

6 Lessons Learned to Make your Baseline Study Participatory and Inclusive

In 2019, as part of the Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education (AEHRE) project, Equitas and its local partners conducted a baseline study in the five participating countries: Haiti, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Kenya. A baseline study is used to determine the baseline conditions (indicators) for a project. It serves as a benchmark, against which future progress can be compared.

The project's ultimate goal is to contribute to an increased empowerment of women and girls for the advancement of gender equality in their communities. Through focus group discussions and key informant interviews, the baseline study shed light on the situation with regards to the rights of women and girls in local communities. Gender-based violence and women's participation in decision-making were two main focus areas.

Using a [Human Rights-Based Approach](#) and incorporating a gender perspective, Equitas and its partners aimed to make this process **participatory and inclusive**.

Here are some of our lessons learned:

1. Center the voices and experiences of the communities

- Work in close collaboration with local organizations. Aim to transfer ownership of the baseline study process to local partners. Those in the local context are in the best position to facilitate the study.
- Avoid being extractive. Instead, support an inclusive environment that is created for and by the community you are working with.
- Ensure the participation of marginalized communities (including but not limited to youth, members of LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous Peoples, persons living with disabilities). Generally, those with less power have less access to spaces where they can participate and speak. An intersectional approach provides a fuller understanding of the context, as these are the groups that face the greatest discrimination and exclusion.
- Validate baseline study data with the very communities that participated in the data collection. Share the results of the baseline data collection with community members. *(In the AEHRE, Equitas staff returned to the communities after having analyzed the data and shared the results with community members and duty bearers. Community members had the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback, and validate the data collected.)*

2. Consider gender throughout all parts of the baseline study process (planning, design, development, implementation, and evaluation)

- Ensure gender equity in the formation of the baseline data collection team. This involves including women, men, and gender-diverse people.
- When appropriate, segregate focus groups according to gender and age. This helps address power dynamics in the hopes of creating a more comfortable environment for some participants (e.g., younger women might feel safer discussing amongst their peers).

- Apply an intersectional approach throughout the baseline study process by considering the barriers of diverse groups (e.g., women, persons living with disabilities, people living in remote areas, members of LGBTQI+ community, etc.)
- Ensure that men and boys are engaged as allies in the process. Reinforce the important role they play in addressing gendered issues such as gender-based violence, women's participation in decision-making, etc.

3. Plan and budget for accessibility

- When planning your baseline study, budget for services that will ensure or promote accessibility (e.g., accessible transportation, sign-language interpreters, accessible venue, childcare).
- Announce that these services will be available ahead of time. Community members are more likely to participate if they know that barriers to participation have been broken down.

4. Be prepared to provide support to survivors of violence

- Create a safe space for the discussion of difficult and potentially traumatic topics (e.g., sexual violence, intimate partner abuse). Spaces should allow participants to speak freely, without fearing judgement or reproach. Participants should not feel that they must disclose sensitive information that will cause them to be re-traumatized.
- Consider how the data collection team can best support participants who will be discussing sensitive topics such as violence or trauma.
- Be prepared to support a participant who discloses an instance of violence. Develop a protocol for responding to a disclosure of violence and be prepared to provide resources (i.e., referral information sheet) to support survivors.

5. Be transparent about how you are using participant information

- Communicate all necessary information to help participants make an informed decision about participating in baseline study activities.
- Allocate time to clearly explain the consent forms to participants and ensure that they understand their rights and how you will be using the information they share.

6. Respect the time and schedule of participants

- Consider the safety and security of participants when scheduling an activity (e.g., avoid having community members travel at night)
- Consider the daily responsibilities of community members when planning activities (e.g., women taking care of domestic work in the mornings, market day)
- In rural areas, allow additional time for participants to arrive, as they may be traveling longer distances.